

My Heart's a Battle Ground

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Summary: "It broke his heart to see someone so strong and fiery suddenly become so weak and dependent as she crumbled forward, her forehead pressed to Toothless' neck. He paused for a brief moment to touch her freckled cheek before the sound of battle cries brought him back to earth and the dangerous situation they were in." A Merida/Hiccup fic.

1. Chapter 1

"MERIDA!"

The sound of his own voice was deafening as everything froze around him. Toothless reared up with a loud screech as he watched his companion's friend tumble across the raging battle field. Without a moment's hesitation, Hiccup pulled on the reins of the dragon and they immediately shot towards the fallen princess. The pair dove between Scots clashing against Vikings in a desperate attempt to reach her. Arrows scraped his cheeks and clicked against Toothless' scaly body, but the young man barely noticed, his emerald eyes glued on the redhead girl.

Weakly, she glanced up as the Night Fury skid to a stop in front of her and his rider jumped off his harness. Despite her pain, she was able to smile upon seeing him. Hiccup knelt at her side and forced her hand away from her wounded side to examine the axe wound—it took all his strength not to vomit at the depth of the cut. "OK—OK, we're going to get you somewhere safe. Merida—Merida," he rambled, trying to keep himself calm as he cupped her cheek with his now blood soaked hand. "You're gonna be OK," he promised, taking note of the distant look in her eyes.

"—Hiccup," she mumbled, eyes squeezing shut as a fire ball from one of the catapults landed nearby. Instinctively, Hiccup pulled her against his chest as Toothless leapt over to shield them with his fireproof form. Immediately, he nudged his nose against his

companion, begging him to move from his precarious position.

Immediately, Hiccup gathered his fallen friend into his arms and struggled to his feet. "OK, buddy, we've got to get Merida somewhere safe," he wheezed as he hefted the princess up to his saddle. It broke his heart to see someone so strong and fiery suddenly become so weak and dependent as she crumbled forward, her forehead pressed to Toothless' neck. He paused for a brief moment to touch her freckled cheek before the sound of battle cries brought him back to earth and the dangerous situation they were in. He threw himself into his harness and pulled the redhead against his chest, her head tucked beneath his chin. Toothless peered back at him and they locked eyes; without a word, the dragon leapt up into the air, spiraling to avoid loose arrows and catapulted rocks.

Hiccup peered at the princess cradled against him and freed his hand from the reins to carefully cup her cheek and wipe the stream of pained tears away. Merida's eyes cracked open to peek at him and she forced a smile at his solemn expression. "'eyâ€| Cheer up, Viking," she whispered, lifting a trembling hand to his. He answered with a cough-like laugh and wound his fingers tightly around hers, holding her ever closer.

"Yeah, wellâ€| you just survive and then I'll see about cheering up, how's that?"

She giggled and went silent, tucking her face against his chest once more.

His brow cinched together and he tore his gaze away from her to peer ahead at where they were flying as he adjusted his grip around her shoulders. Fingers tightened around the leather harness as he hunched over further. "Toothless, head for the river!" he shouted over the wind, pulling the reins towards the west where the river lay miles from the violent conflict between their people. Toothless' ears perked in understanding and he shot towards the water, peering back occasionally to check on his friends, the smell of spilt blood making his nostrils flare. "I know, buddy, I knowâ€|we'll make it stop soonâ€|just keep flying!" Toothless tilted his head in a nod and continued soaring forward.

As soon as they landed, Hiccup leapt from his dragon. He bit his lip as he looked back at his princess before he quickly scooped her up and laid her on a suitable looking plot of grass. Panic settled in as he peered at her face and her closed eyes. Quickly, he cupped her face and began to shake her gently. "Meridaâ€|Merida, you need to open your eyes. You hafta stay with me," he whispered, his forehead resting against his as he listened to Toothless settle around the two of them with a whine.

He squeezed his eyes shut and he grit his teeth as he wound his fingers through her hair, listening intently for her breathingâ€|finally, he was able to catch the staggered breaths and he relaxed lightly before he pressed his lips desperately to her temple. "Just hold onâ€|" Finally, he pulled back and forced himself to look at the bleeding mass that was once her left side. With a deep inhale, he slowly tore the blood soaked fabric away from her hip wound. He peered at her face to check for a reaction as he hesitantly touched the cut.

Merida cried out weakly, her brow furrowing together as Toothless' head shot up, ears flattened back with a low growl.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry," he quickly murmured, scooping up a hand full of water to wipe the wound clean. His hand trembled as he immediately realized that there was nothing he could do with his limited knowledge of medicine. Mentally, he cursed and prayed to Odin for her to be alright. Without a second thought, he tore his sleeve from his shoulder and ripped it from his arm. Firmly, he pressed the wad of fabric to her side, doing all he could to staunch the blood flow. "Just stay with me. Just stay with me." his eyes began to water in frustration, "Just stay with me."

The familiar sensation of feminine fingers brushing his cheeks drew his attention back up. Earth clashed with sea as their eyes locked and he watched as Merida weakly smiled and brushed his overgrown bangs back. A relieved sigh broke past his lips and he set his head against hers, lacing his free fingers through her wild curls. "Thank the Gods," he murmured, his spine tingling from the sensation of her running her hand through his mussed hair before she lifted his face up.

"Now, ye promised ye'd cheer up," she whispered, a weak smile pulling on her shaking lips as she pulled him closer, tucking his hair behind an ear. "So cheer up." Lightly, she pressed her lips to his, making his cheeks flare up in a vivid flush as she pulled back. He blinked rapidly before a crooked grin crossed his face, which in turn made Merida giggle weakly.

"Well, um heh, uh Iâ€¦ yeah," he finished lamely before he settled down beside her and slid his arm about her shoulder to hold her closer as he adjusted his hand on the fabric against her waist. His smile softened as he felt her nuzzle her head up against his, his fingers adjusting in her locks. Momentarily, his gaze tore from Merida to watch Toothless scoot closer, his tail circling about them protectively as his head rested above theirs with a purr.

The trio laid in silence for what felt like an eternity, taking comfort in the presence of each other. Occasionally, Hiccup would pull back to check on Merida's condition before he would comfortably settle back against her, his grip tightening slightly about her each time. In response, he would get a smirk from the girl for his obsessive worrying and a light nudge of her shoulder. He merely shrugged and smiled lightly before tucking his head back beside hers. Merida's hair was an extremely comfortable pillow, and her scent floated comfortably through his nose when he settled with her this way. Under any other circumstances, Hiccup was sure he would be enjoying this moment with his two best friendsâ€"if it were not for the damage, the pain and the sounds of war waging, even in the distance, it would have been perfect.

"Merida," he whispered, nudging her cheek with his. She blinked lightly and her cerulean eyes flickered over to him.

"Aye?" she croaked.

"Just making sure you were stillâ€"you knowâ€"with usâ€"Awake and all," he murmured, relaxing lightly as she lifted a weak arm to scratch at Toothless' ears.

"It'll take more than this to drag me down completely, Hiccup."

He smiled and shifted the arm around her shoulders to brush his knuckles against her cheek. "Yeah, I kind of figured thaâ€"

Toothless' head shot up and he began to growl as the sound of snapping twigs and metal clashing with wood began to reach their peaceful grove. "What is it, buddy?" Hiccup asked, scrambling to sit up as he freed his arm from Merida's neck. He followed the dragon's line of sight and frowned as two massive forms came thundering towards them; without a second thought, Hiccup pulled Merida up into his armsâ€"with a great deal of difficultyâ€"and pressed further against Toothless for protection. The Night Fury hissed at the approaching figures and curved his tail around his human companions, yellow eyes narrowed dangerously at the hunkering forms.

Faintly, voices could be made outâ€"voices that were far too familiar.

"Dad," they both murmured, exchanging nervous glances as they could hear their names being called, accompanied by angry and furious banter.

"We need to go," was all Hiccup could muster as Toothless helped him to his feet, Merida cradled tightly in his arms. Reluctantly, the princess wound her arms around the man's scrawny neck before she knit her brow together in thought and tightened her grip on him protectively. He blinked at her and then smiled nervously as he moved to climb on Toothless' back.

"OY. PUT MY DAUGHTER DOWN, YE DE'IL SPAWN!" roared Fergus' voice as he burst into the clearing. Instinctively, Hiccup whirled around, losing his footing and stumbling back into the Night Fury, who lowered his head and began to growl at the large Scotsman. The king puffed himself up and huffed angrily through his nose as he looked down at the brunette Viking on the forest floor, his daughter clutched firmly in the monster's vile hands. Toothless curled over the two youth, lips curled back in a vicious snarl, prepared to pounce.

"No, Toothless, no," Hiccup ordered, unwinding his arm from under Merida's legs and placing his palm on the reptile's nose. "Backâ€"don't hurt him. We're not here to hurt anyone." The beast's bright eyes drooped as he peered at his companion and he whined in defeat as he backed away slowly, keeping his gaze steady on the Scot, daring him to harm his friend.

Nervously, Hiccup flickered his gaze between his dragon and the father of the girl in his arms before he looked down at her. "Meridaâ€"come on," he whispered, shifting his arms lightlyâ€"she refused to budge, her eyes glued defiantly up at him, and tightened her grip on his neck as Fergus began to step closer.

"If ye dare to touch my boy, Scot," came a harsh growl, accompanied by the sound of a shifting axe. Fergus tore his gaze from his daughter to glare at the towering Viking approaching from his right. Stoick frowned deeply and narrowed his eyes threateningly before he turned his attention to his son. "Hiccupâ€"put her down."

"I can't."

"Hiccupâ€"ye will put that mess down or I will make ye."

"No, I can't. She's hurt, and she won't let goâ€"so, see, I can't."

"Merida," Fergus snapped in, staring at his stubborn child. For a moment, she tore her gaze away from the Viking boy and met her father's eyes. Her nose scrunched up as she pouted at him and then made a point of readjusting her hold on Hiccup's neck. "Merida! Ye will listen to ye'r father! Let go of 'im, now!"

"No," she retorted. "I know 'ow it will end if I doâ€"I won't let ye hurt Hiccup."

Hiccup blinked and found he could not help the dorky grin that broke across his face. It vanished immediately when he saw the expressions carved into the faces of their fathers. Awkwardly, he cleared his throat and pursed his lips.

"â€| Fine," Fergus growled, starting forward with sword drawn.

In a fluid, quick motion that Hiccup was not expecting from the hurt girl, Merida was standing protectively above him, her bow drawn with arrow locked in place. Pain was obvious on her face, her eyes narrowed and her fingers trembling as fresh blood began to make trails down her side again. "I won't let ye hurt Hiccup," Merida repeated, staring into her father's surprised eyes. "Dad, I don't want to hurt yeâ€"I don't want to hurt anyoneâ€"but I can't let ye hurt himâ€"he's my friend. My best friend." Stoick blinked at the fiery princess in front of him and then peered down at his son, who was staring up at her with a dazed expressionâ€"the same look he had once given Valhallarama. Immediately, he lowered his axe.

He had almost lost his son the last time he had not trusted him and his choices, he would not go through the same thing again.

As the words sank in, the king blinked slowly at his daughter before he sheathed his sword again and held out his hands softly. "Alrightâ€| Alright, I trust ye, princess. I won't hurt ye'r friend," he whispered, watching her adjust her fingers against her weapons. "Meridaâ€"I promise. No one will hurt himâ€"or his beast." Toothless huffed lightly.

Slowly, Merida relaxed her arms and loosed the arrow, setting it aside. Fergus took a step forward with hands extended to take herâ€"and she collapsed back.

The last thing she heard was Hiccup screaming her name as she was overcome with pain and darkness.

2. Chapter 2

Elinor sat across the bed from a scrawny young man, his fingers playing softly against the top of her daughter's hand as she slept. This boy had barely moved from her sideâ€"and the dragon that accompanied him was vigilant at his side. Whenever either of them

left the room, it was with great reluctance. More often than not, Elinor, or one of the maids, would come in to find him curled over the mattress with his head rested on the princess' mass of curls, his fingers wound with hers.

Today marked the seventh day of Merida's fever induced sleep—occasionally, her eyes would open and she would be coherent enough to swallow water and a few bites of food, but then she would return to unconsciousness. Herbs were pressed against the gash on her side and scattered in her food in attempts to heal her. Bandages were changed and prayers performed, but still, she would not waken fully.

Hiccup quietly sighed as he stilled his hand atop hers and looked up into her face.

Despite her worry and fear, Elinor could not restrain the smile that appeared on her lips as she watched the Viking interact with her sleeping child. "— I can tell she means a great deal to ye, Hiccup," she softly observed. He blinked in surprise and then peered over at her.

"Well— yeah," he stammered, not sure how to properly talk to the queen. He was so comfortable with Merida and her loose personality that he did not quite know how to interact with someone so regal. "I mean— She's amazing—brave, adventurous, strong, beautiful—" The queen's expression softened and she reached over to brush a loose curl from Merida's face.

"She's also stubborn."

"Oh, yes, she is—but that's what makes her Merida," Hiccup replied, cracking a weak grin which Elinor returned with a nod.

"Well— she's very lucky to have someone like ye at her side, Hiccup," she said, standing slowly, her long locks rippling about her in waterfalls.

"Thank you, your highness," he awkwardly answered, bowing his head respectfully.

Lovingly, Elinor placed a kiss on Merida's forehead before she made her way to the door—even in personal crisis, a queen had duties to attend to. "I shall send lunch up for you and your dragon; we don't need a second patient in this castle." Hiccup chuckled and nodded in thanks as she closed the door behind her. Immediately, he released his held breath and rested his head back beside the sleeping princess' as Toothless lifted his head up from the floor to rest it beside his master's. He let out a low, sad growl as he peered at Hiccup. The Viking smiled at the black beast and rested his free hand atop his massive head.

"I know, buddy, I know—"

Simultaneously, dragon and rider released sighs and closed their eyes, listening to the sounds of three beings breathing. Seconds ticked on slowly and Hiccup felt himself grow extremely tired. As his companion began to doze, Toothless' ears flickered up and his eyes opened to slivers as he peered at the sleeping girl. His sensitive ears perked, listening inventively to her breathing, and his nostrils

flared as he tilted his head softly, sensing a change in her. Lightly, he purred, which caught Hiccup's attention. "What is it, buddy?" he yawned.

Toothless' eyes flickered up and down over Merida's face before he reached his head over and nuzzled his nose against her cheek, the low purr rumbling in the back of his throat. As the dragon continued to rub his scaly face across hers, Hiccup watched as her stormy eyes began to sliver open. In surprise, he shot to attention and tried to push Toothless back as he began to lick at her chin and nip at her hair. "Merida? Merida?" he plead in hushed tones as he carefully touched his fingers to her jaw. Her eyes fluttered around a moment before they rested on his.

"â€¦ Hiccup?"

The first word she had spoken in days.

And it was his name.

"Yeahâ€¦yeah! It's me, it's me," he said, cradling her face between his hands. After a moment, he sniffed and hugged her close. "â€¦ You're awakeâ€¦" Merida grunted lightly before she was able to swallow the bit of discomfort back and wound her arms around his middle as he desperately laced his fingers up through her hair. After a long momentâ€¦and after several nudges from Toothlessâ€¦Hiccup slowly pulled back and smiled at the redhead, who was weakly grinning at him from her pillows. Her piercing eyes scrutinized his appearance.

"Ach, see what happens when I leave ye alone for one moment? Ye let ye'rself go to pieces," she laughed, reaching up to touch the dark circles under his eyes. It was true, Hiccup was very disheveledâ€¦his hair was mussed, his face scarred, eyes very tired and worn from long nights without sleep.

He huffed indignantly, though his smile never faded. "Well, someone had to stay by your side," he laughed. "You're very good at keeping everyone on edge." Toothless had nuzzled his way between the two of them and had begun happily cuddling against Merida's cheeks, making her smile.

"So I've been told," she hummed, scratching at Toothless' ears. "â€¦ how long was I out for?"

"â€¦ seven days."

She went quiet and thoughtful as Toothless purred, content with the sensation of her fingers tickling his sensitive scales. "I see," she hummed, smiling weakly as Toothless licked her face. Merida paused and then looked up at Hiccup, expression softened. "â€¦ thank ye, for staying with me that long."

Hiccup grinned nervously and shrugged slightly. "It was nothing, reallyâ€¦I did what any good friend would do. I had to make sure you'd be okay. I mean, what kind of frieâ€¦" He was cut off quickly by a pair of rosy lips pressed firmly on his, Merida's hand shakily resting on his cheek. Hiccup stared down at her a moment before he allowed his eyes to flutter shut and his fingers to wind into her hair. As they drew apart, Hiccup blinked repeatedly before his grin

returned, watching as Merida smirked up at him, her cheeks a pale coat of pink.

"â€| ye're more than an ordinary friend, Hiccup," she stated, ruffling his hair lightly.

"â€| yeah, thatâ€| kind of gave me the hint," he chuckled, rubbing his neck shyly. Silence settled in between them as they studied each other before Hiccup hesitantly leaned in again, second guessing himself before he lightly kissed her again. She happily complied and returned it. As they pulled apart again, he smiled and asked, "Soâ€| can I say "I love you?" Or would that be useless to say now?"

Merida laughed. "I love ye, too, idiot."

End
file.